



COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY PUEBLO
School of Education



Be an Educator!

Colorado State University Pueblo's Journey to the Science of Reading

Mission

The CSU Pueblo School of Education has a primary mission of preparing and developing educators of quality and distinction. At Colorado State University Pueblo, preparing teachers is a campus-wide responsibility, with faculty and administrators involved in support of the program's mission.

An integral component of the program is its partnerships with 17 school districts and 4 community colleges in southern and southeastern Colorado. The joint efforts of students, faculty, and administrators across all partners focus on improving the quality of learning in classrooms throughout P-20 education.

Colorado State University Pueblo's Educator Preparation Program

Colorado State University Pueblo is located in Pueblo, Colorado in the southeastern part of the state. CSU Pueblo is a small, regional comprehensive university and is one member of the larger Colorado State University system.

The educator preparation program at CSU Pueblo has bachelor, master, and doctoral degree programs. It offers pathways to Colorado educator licensure in 23 endorsement areas. Some of these include early childhood education, elementary education, and special education. CSU Pueblo has traditional pathways toward licensure, as well as alternative pathways toward licensure. Currently, the program services approximately 400 students through in-person, online, and hybrid courses. CSU Pueblo's educator preparation program is run by 10 faculty members, one of whom has specialized training in reading, language, and literacy.

Where the Journey Began

Historically, CSU Pueblo's educator preparation program had embraced the instructional approach of reading that was popular with the times—Whole Language towards the end of the 20th century and then balanced literacy after that. The reading courses were taught by a few different faculty members, all of whom taught from these various instructional approaches. As time went on, some professors retired, others left, and shifts in coursework were made. Slowly, an adjunct instructor, Vicki Piquette, was tasked with teaching all of the reading courses for the program because she was well-trained and helped generate students with excellent outcomes.

Around this same time, in the fall of 2016, a local school district made contact with the head of CSU-Pueblo's Teacher Education department. They invited him to discuss a new reading program that they were implementing. The dean met with two district leaders, and they shared with him some information about the science of reading and their new, structured literacy curriculum. They told him that they were on the cutting edge for changes that the state was making, and then asked him if he'd be willing to consider implementing this approach in the

reading program at the university. The dean had not yet heard of any new required changes from the state, and was not entirely sure what the two district leaders were even talking about. He politely thanked them for their time and then told them that he was intrigued by what they were telling him, but the reading course curriculum was up to the instructors as long as they were meeting the course objectives. He was, however, interested in meeting the needs of the school district in better training elementary school teachers to be able to teach reading. He just was not sure how to go about this and did not agree to anything in particular.

In the spring of 2017, the same local school district's reading specialist reached out to Vicki and invited her to sit down to discuss some new things that the district had recently learned about reading instruction. Vicki was nervous about this meeting, but the dean of the program assured her that they just wanted to show her their new program. He encouraged Vicki to be open to what they were saying, but to do what she wanted to with the information presented to her. The literacy specialist had just received LETRS training. At this point, Vicki did not promise to change anything about her instruction of teacher candidates, but she did promise to look more closely at what had been shared with her—Scarborough's Rope, the Simple View of Reading, and the issues surrounding the 3-Cueing System. Shortly after this discussion had occurred, the district literacy specialist reached back out to Vicki and invited her to a week-long professional development that the district was hosting to train their teachers on how to implement the new structured literacy program designed by a reading instruction expert who worked for the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). Vicki agreed to attend this professional development and this is where the change really began. In the first day of the professional development, Vicki felt very confident about everything that was being presented, but when day two rolled around, it was obvious to Vicki that despite having a master's degree in reading, she lacked a lot of knowledge around the structure of the English language. On the last day of the professional development, the presenter made a comment that the best course she ever took in college was a linguistics course. When driving home from the professional development that day, Vicki called up her Dean and told him that she knew what was missing from the teacher preparation courses for elementary and early childhood teachers—knowledge of linguistics! The dean encouraged Vicki to design a course to fill in these gaps and, in the spring of 2021, Vicki taught the course, *Linguistics for Educators*, for the very first time.

What Has Changed

Since the initial steps forward, a lot more has changed in CSU-Pueblo's education program. Vicki received LETRS and LETRS for Early Childhood Educators training. In addition, Vicki found several social media groups all centered on the science of reading and structured literacy instruction. She read anything and everything about the science of reading and structured literacy instruction that she could find. From her deepening knowledge of the science of reading and structured literacy practices, Vicki began to revamp all of the reading courses for the CSU Pueblo educator preparation programs. In addition, Colorado was moving from recommendations to mandates at the state level that would require all P-12 schools to utilize a structured literacy approach and for educator preparation programs to teach the science of reading and a structured literacy approach in their coursework. Vicki secured a tenure-track position at CSU Pueblo in the fall of 2022 and officially inherited all of the reading courses for

the program, including *Teaching Reading, Disciplinary Literacy, Teaching Writing, Reading Assessment and Intervention, and Integrated Literacy*, in addition to the *Linguistics for Educators* course. To date, all of the reading and literacy courses offered at CSU-Pueblo are aligned with the science of reading and connect to provide teacher candidates and in-service teachers a comprehensive education in the science of reading and structured literacy practices.

Challenges

One of the biggest challenges that CSU Pueblo has met is finding fieldwork placements for teacher candidates that implement structured literacy practices. Even though students are learning about the science of reading and structured literacy in their coursework, they are not able to observe its implementation in the field or practice its implementation unless they are in structured literacy classrooms. Despite the state requiring changes, many teachers in the local area still held on to balanced literacy and whole language approaches to teaching reading.

Another challenge has been the alignment of all coursework to the science of reading and the science of learning. Even though Vicki's reading courses adhere to the science of reading and the science of learning, not all of the courses in the program do. There are still lingering balanced literacy and whole language philosophies present in the department's faculty and even though the faculty members do not intentionally undermine what students are learning in their reading courses, these philosophies slip into some instruction and coursework.

Where We Are Now & Next Steps

In the summer of 2023, the same local school district that reached out to Vicki five years prior, reached back out to Vicki to see if a partnership between the district and the university could be re-established. This district had undergone several changes over the prior couple of years and a lot of these changes had been done at the administrative level. During these changes, the partnership between the district and the university had become less collaborative. Starting in the fall of 2023, the district wanted to pilot a new structured literacy program and wanted Vicki and another colleague to take part in this pilot. As part of the pilot, Vicki and her colleague would conduct observational research in all of the district's kindergarten and first grade classrooms. In addition, Vicki's fieldwork students would be placed in these structured literacy classrooms and Vicki's coursework would align with what was happening in the district's classrooms. Teacher candidates are now observing and implementing effective, structured literacy practices in the field as part of their coursework.

It is noteworthy that the dean and fellow faculty members of the School of Education at CSU-Pueblo trust Vicki as the specialist in the area of reading instruction. They have supported her to make the necessary changes in reading courses. Vicki's confidence in the science of reading paired with the pressure from the state are key factors in making these changes come to fruition and even resulted in a very positive program reauthorization visit from the state department of education in Spring 2023 – especially regarding state literacy requirements.

In addition, Vicki is currently working with a faculty member in the School of Education to implement science of reading content into the principal preparation program. Educational leadership needs to understand the key issues and so is another next step for CSU Pueblo. Finally, Vicki is in the initial stages of starting the accreditation process with the International

Dyslexia Association. Additional plans are being considered to add courses and change coursework to give teacher candidates more time and opportunities to learn about the science of reading and to implement structured literacy practices in the field. Whenever the opportunity arises, Vicki serves as an advocate for the science of reading and structured literacy at the local, state, national, and international levels with her involvement in many professional organizations and groups centered around the same purpose—to increase awareness of the science of reading and to promote structured literacy instruction for all students.